

AN ANTI-HERO'S HEROES : ARCHILOCHUS BETWEEN ODYSSEUS AND TELEPHUS (P.OXY. LXIX 4708)

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Odysseus is easily recognizable as a major model for the persona which the archaic poet Archilochus constructed about himself. For example, Archilochus' address to his heart, fr. 128 West, recalls Odysseus' similar words in *Od.* 20.17–20 ; his description of his preferred type of officer in fr. 114 W. echoes Priam's description of Odysseus himself in the *teichoskopia*, *Il.* 3.190–198. Now we can recognize another heroic model for the archaic poet. The new fragment of Archilochus' *Elegies*, P.Oxy. LXIX 4708, re-edited from an improved image and further discussed by the original editor, Dirk Obbink (2006) 1–9, now suggests that Archilochus found another model for himself in the hero Telephus¹. In this paper I will suggest that a further dimension to this hero which attracted Archilochus may have been his skills and reputation as a clever speaker, a characteristic also shared of course with Odysseus.

The story of Telephus told how, soon after he had taken over the kingdom of Mysia, he was attacked by the first expedition of the Greeks against Troy who had landed there by mistake². At first he succeeded in driving them back, and it is this part of the story which is the subject of the new elegiac fragment. But when Achilles and Patroclus arrived, Telephus in his turn was forced to flee. Before leaving Aulis, the Greeks had sacrificed to Dionysus. The Mysians, however, had overlooked him and the god now had his revenge. He caused a vine to spring from the ground. The vine tripped Telephus up as he ran away, and Achilles caught up with him and wounded him in the thigh with his famous spear.

In their discussions of the new papyrus text, both Obbink and West – who offers a slightly differing reading and interpretation – are essentially in agreement that, in the first of the complete lines of the new poem, Archilochus seems to be using this episode as an *exemplum* to defend himself against a charge of cowardice³. Running away in battle should not be considered cowardice if one is driven back by the force of a god. Flight is sometimes unavoidable, he says, as it was when Telephus, assisted by his father Heracles, drove back the Greeks who had landed in Mysia.

It is easy to see how this part of the Telephus story might fit with what we know of Archilochus' poetic persona. Just as Telephus had followed his father Heracles, so Archilochus also followed in his own father's footsteps. Both of them were closely involved in the constant fighting against the native Thracian tribes, which attended the Parian colonization of Thasos, as well as the ongoing hostilities between Paros and Naxos as the island rivals competed for the region's resources. As a mercenary, Archilochus presents as the archetypal anti-hero. Like Telephus he is not afraid to run away if the gods are against him. This eminently practical view emerges in the best known of his poems, fr. 5 W., in which he boasts of abandoning his shield beside a bush, confident of getting another just as good⁴. It was this self-professed reputation as a shield dropper which, along with his verbal attacks on Lycambes and his daughters, would earn Archilochus such notoriety among later aristocratic writers.

¹ To speak of « Archilochus » does not imply of course that I believe that we are dealing always or entirely with a « real » historical figure. The Archilochus who emerges so vividly from his poems may be an imaginary construct, not a real person, or a mix of the two which may vary from one poem to another : *caveat lector*, as always with any creative work.

² For the most complete modern account of the Telephus legend, see Strauss (1994) 856–857 (857–70, illustrations of the Telephus legend). Schwenn (1934) remains useful.

³ See West (2006), esp. 15–16.

⁴ Indeed Peter Parsons has suggested that the new poem may even be a continuation of fr. 5 W. : see P.Oxy. LXIX 4708, introd. p. 20.

There is also an iambic adespoton, fr. 38, 5–11 W., noted by West as likely to be ascribed to Archilochus, which brings together both these themes, that it is not dishonorable to abandon one's shield or to run away if a god is helping the other side.

Another poem which may also refer to the gods helping in battle is fr. 94 W., preserved on the so-called inscription of Sosthenes of c. 100 BC in the Archilocheion, the hero shrine which later Parians set up to Archilochus. There is also Archilochus' address to his heart, fr. 128 W., mentioned above, where Archilochus both encourages his heart to stand firm and also counsels moderation in both victory and defeat. This very pragmatic view of life and death, and success and failure, also occurs in fr. 110 W. with its characteristic sentiment that Ares is impartial, and slays the would-be slayer. We see therefore from a number of poems how Archilochus may have identified with Telephus, and so can understand the potential attraction for him of this episode in the Telephus legend – the tale of a victor who, after an initial success, will be turned in flight by the whim of the gods at the very moment of his apparent triumph.

In addition to this, I want to suggest that there is also another dimension to Telephus with which Archilochus may have felt an affinity: that is with Telephus' skills and reputation as a talker. The Telephus legend continued by telling how the wound in his thigh had continued to fester, and how, directed by Apollo, he had made his way to Agamemnon's palace in Argos disguised as a beggar to plead his case before the Greeks and beg for a cure. When his true identity was revealed, Telephus had snatched up the baby Orestes and threatened to kill him. This is perhaps the best known episode of the whole Telephus legend, and the origin of Telephus' notoriety as Euripides' archetypal beggar king, dramatized in the *Telephos* of 438 BC. The « Telephus as suppliant » figure is known to us now principally from Aristophanes' parodies of this episode in the *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazousae*, and in Hellenistic art from the Telephus frieze (unfortunately much damaged) in the inner court of the Pergamon altar in Berlin.

In Aristophanes' long parody of the « Telephus as suppliant » scene in *Acharnians* 393–489, the comic hero Dikaeopolis begs Euripides for the Telephus costume in order to plead his case before the enraged Acharnians. The reason why he wants this costume rather than any of the others which Euripides offers is that Telephus is not simply a lame beggar (χωλὸς προκαίτων); it is primarily because he is both *εὐμύλος*, « fluent, a chatterbox », and *δεινὸς λέγειν*, « a clever speaker » (*Ach.* 429). Indeed in fr. 715 of Euripides' *Telephos* an unknown speaker compares Telephus explicitly to Odysseus: « Odysseus then is not alone in wheedling (οὐ ... αἰμύλος μόνος). Need teaches a man to be clever, even someone slow to learn. » Similarly, the humour in the other Aristophanic Telephus parody in *Thesm.* 466–764 depends on the comic reversal that while the kinsman has a lot to say in defending Euripides against the angry women, he actually has too much to say and is not at all clever at saying it.

There are then two different aspects to Telephus' character as a speaker. He is both a clever and a skilful speaker, one who is comparable to Odysseus. But he also has another, non-Odyssean quality: like Dikaeopolis or the kinsman who defends Euripides, he is somebody who never knows when to stop talking. That is why the one occasion when Telephus was silent came to be regarded as particularly noteworthy. Aristotle, *Poetics* 24 (1460a20), deploring the introduction of unconvincing details into a plot, gives as an example how « in the *Mysians* the man who did not speak (ὁ ἄφωνος) came from Tegea to Mysia ». From the context this must be Sophocles' lost play the *Mysians*, which dealt with Telephus' arrival in Mysia and his reunion with his mother. The event which silenced him must have been his earlier murder of her brothers. In fact, as Robert Graves noted many years ago, it looks like the silence of Telephus may have become something of a proverb, to judge from Athenaeus' quotations from two comic playwrights, Amphis (*Athen.* 6, 5

[224d]) and Alexis (Athen. 10, 18 [421d]) commenting ironically how difficult it is to get a word out of fishmongers in the market place or a glutton at mealtimes⁵.

Archilochus is not immediately thought of as possessing the characteristics of a speaker who was both clever and verbose. The major part of Archilochus' « lovely gift of the Muses » (fr. 1 W.), as far as later Greeks were concerned, were his poetical skills, demonstrated in his metrical innovations. He is credited variously with the invention of the iambic trimeter (test. 47), trochaic tetrameter, the epode, and even the elegiac couplet (test. 47 and 48), as well as the introduction of the dithyramb to Paros under the patronage of Dionysus (fr. 120 W.)⁶. But there are clues to suggest that perhaps he also promoted himself and was seen by others as not only skilled at talking but, like Telephus, equally loquacious.

There can be no doubt that Archilochus' linguistic skills were just as impressive as his metrical innovations, even if the words which he used sometimes left much to be desired. He could win over the most reluctant of women by the charm and amusement of his words, as we see from fragments 23 and 196a W. (the Cologne epode). The story of his meeting with the Muses, recorded on the III BC inscription of Mnesiepes (test. 3) from the Archilochion, also shows us someone who was full of self-confidence even from an early age. The inscription tells of the young Archilochus sent into the country by his father to bring down a cow for sale. He got up late in the night while the moon was still shining, and was on his way down when he thought he saw a group of women. Thinking that they were on their way home to town from their work, he approached them and began to banter with them (test. 3, 30 : κώπτειν). They received him with joking and laughter – confirming that κώπτειν must here be taken in its good sense – and asked if his cow was for sale. He said she was, and they offered him a good price. At which point both the women and the cow disappeared and Archilochus was amazed to find a lyre lying at his feet. The women he had met and flirted with had been the Muses and the lyre was their « good price », as was confirmed later by an oracle of Apollo. As Clay (2004) 15 points out, the fact that it was Archilochus who initiated the contact by approaching the women rather than vice versa is a reversal of the traditional pattern as we see it in Hesiod's meeting with the Muses. While still only a young boy, Archilochus clearly already had the power to amuse and flatter by his words. He was no dull rustic like Hesiod.

In addition, if Archilochus was crossed at all, then the virulence of his invective was something to be greatly feared, as we see in the story of Lycambes and his daughters, driven to suicide by the violence and obscenity of Archilochus' attacks on them (test. 19–32). Telephus may have been δεινὸς λέγειν in Dikaeopolis' words in Aristoph. *Ach.* 429. But Archilochus was δεινὸς ὑβρίζειν according to Eustathius (test. 24), who also records a proverbial saying, « you've stepped on Archilochus ». Eustathius explains this as a proverb applied to those adept at such abuse, « as if to say you have stepped on a snake or a scorpion or a painful thorn ». Archilochus then was recognised as having both a honeyed and a sharp side to his tongue.

So much for his skill as a speaker. What of his loquacity? There is a short fragment, fr. 223 W., of unknown genre, τέττιγος ἐδράζω πτεροῦ, « you have caught a cicada by the wing ». Lucian, who quotes it, explains that when someone spoke ill of him, « Archilochus said that the man had caught a cicada by the wing, comparing himself to the cicada which is a chatterer (λάλος) by nature even without any compulsion, and cries out the louder whenever it is caught by the wing. »⁷ Archilochus therefore seems have been quite ready to defend his abusive iambs by comparing himself to a creature which was proverbial for its loquacity⁸.

⁵ See Graves (1955) II, Sect. 141.

⁶ On the introduction of Dionysus to Paros, see Clay (2004).

⁷ Lucian, *Pseudolog.* 1 (III 133, 6 Macleod).

⁸ For these characteristics of the cicada, see LSJ s.v. τέττιξ.

In addition to its loquacity, the cicada was of course known also for the sweetness of its singing. As a consequence, just like Archilochus, the cicada was closely associated with the Muses, being known according to Socrates as « the servant of the Muses »⁹. Even so, Archilochus' comparison of himself to such a creature is perhaps not to be taken entirely seriously. It certainly seems to be deliberately disingenuous on his part. It is one thing to catch a harmless insect by the wing and have it buzzing around in your hand, quite another to step on a poisonous snake and get bitten.

In conclusion, Archilochus' retelling of the episode from the Telephus legend in which Telephus was initially successful in battle until the gods turned against him certainly presents an *exemplum* excusing his own flight in battle when a god or gods were similarly opposed. But we can perhaps also identify in it another point of contact between Archilochus and Telephus. A further reason which may have drawn Archilochus to this episode was that he felt a special affinity in character with Telephus. Like Odysseus, both of them were δεινὸς λέγειν, and both of them were skilled at talking (albeit in different contexts). But unlike Odysseus both of them were also λάλοι. This point of contact was one which might have led Archilochus to choose the Telephus story in preference to, *e.g.*, one of the many Iliadic episodes which he could have chosen equally well to illustrate his thesis that flight is no dishonour when the gods are hostile¹⁰.

Bibliography

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⁹ Plat. *Phdr.* 258e–259d and 262d.

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